

here. It would cost well on to 4s.—3s. 7d., I believe, was the total charges—to send them to Addington. The reason for this state of affairs is not far to seek. The meat companies in the North Island, and to some extent in the South Island, are dealers in fat sheep. In addition to that they freeze on owners' account; but from the fact that they have been buying sheep from the farmers for years, and are still buying them, it is obvious that they are making money out of it; and, if so, it would pay them to get all the sheep they can, fat and otherwise. You see that the interests of the farmer and the companies are inimical when the companies are buying sheep. I have the chairman of the Meat-export Company's own figures for this statement: that the fat stock was 238,000 carcasses which were put through the Meat-export Company's works last year; and, according to his figures, 96,000 were put through by private owners and dealers. Of that number Mr. W. C. Buchanan himself put through 16,000, and of the forty-four private owners and dealers one man put through one-sixth of the total. Now, we know that Messrs. Abraham and Williams and other big dealers were putting through sheep in the same way; and it narrows itself down to this fact, that the great bulk of these 96,000 sheep were sold to the c.i.f. buyers. So you will see that out of the 238,000 something like 200,000 were sold to the c.i.f. buyers in the colony, and the others went Home to the London market in a vast stream from the freezing-works. The greater part of the meat is taken up before it gets to England. Now, I maintain that that is the cause of the difference in price. In Canterbury they have an alternative. If a man does not wish to sell his sheep he can have them put through the Belfast works or sell the mutton himself.

248. *Mr. McLachlan.*] Or the Islington works?—Yes; but the Belfast works have a legitimate freezing business. At an early stage of this industry they educated the farmers in Canterbury and brought them into touch with the c.i.f. men. You find that our poor fellows in the bush do not know what the c.i.f. men mean, and have never come in contact with them. The Belfast Company buy no other sheep and have no axe to grind, and consequently try to do the best for the farmer. We have nothing of the kind here. You never see more than one buyer in the yards here, and he picks out the large, heavy sheep that are fit for the Christchurch people to eat, and, after that pick, the meat is sold at 10s., say, for example. I believe it was 9s. last year. And you have no alternative than to let the sheep go back. You must take the companies' prices or keep your sheep at a loss. I maintain that that is not right. A bargain, to be fair and right, should give the parties the same chance. Now, it is held that the difference is 4s. 6d. of value between the North Island and South Island price—the net price here and at Addington shows a difference of 4s. 6d. But if we knock 9d. off and say 3s. 6d.—there are ten million sheep in the North Island—you will see that the sheep-farmers' capital is reduced by a million and a half pounds by this position. Now, I consider that the remedy for this state of affairs in the North Island is the construction of works in a central place for doing a legitimate business and buying sheep on no account at all. The whole of the mutton, in the North Island at all events, should be graded on one system of uniform grading and classing right through. It is an old axiom that we should set our own house in order before interfering with other people's houses. It is quite possible that c.i.f. men are getting a very good innings out of the thing, and they might be open to conviction. But, at all events, I am quite satisfied, and a great many more people agree with me, that we could do better with the meat companies than we do. I believe the meat should be pooled after careful grading. For sale purposes, where there are a number of small farmers consigning in small lots, it would be advisable that the mutton should be pooled, and each lot classed when filling an order. Of course you will understand that I do not blame the meat companies for the state of affairs complained of. I think it is probably perfectly legitimate business on their part to do the best they can, and I have no word to say against them at all; but at the same time the farmer is perfectly justified in trying to rectify the position if there is anything wrong.

249. They are too long in doing it?—Yes. The farmer appears to be isolated. He is scattered through the bush, and most of them have not very much capital. They have the bush to fell and the land to grass, and they have devoted their main energies to that work and have neglected the other thing. They never have had any one to educate them up to it, because we gather from Mr. Buchanan that it is quite possible to sell to the c.i.f. buyer. Mr. Buchanan came up to Woodville, at any rate, and said it was a good thing to sell to the freezing companies, and then he told us that for over nineteen years he had never sold to the company in which he was a director. He had always shipped on his own account. That gentleman, from his position, should be able to see behind things, and surely if it was good business for him to sell to a c.i.f. buyer it ought to be a good thing for other farmers.

250. I understand he ships and sells in the market at Home?—I did not understand that. In my zeal I do not wish to say anything that is incorrect. If we cannot work the thing on its merits then I think it would be better to leave it alone and sell to the c.i.f. buyer.

251. I understand that when meat is sent Home it is sold in the ordinary way. That is not called c.i.f. buying?—I gathered that Mr. Buchanan's meat is sent to England and sold there by auction. Well, I have a letter from a gentleman under Mr. Buchanan's name that does not bear out that statement. You may, however, possibly be right.

252. I think you said that the Belfast Company does a legitimate freezing business, in that it does not buy. Do you know that the Meat-export Company tried to do that and were forced into buying?—Yes, I know that perfectly well.

253. And now I think we had it from the evidence of Mr. Buchanan that that is what you wish to do?—The provisional directors of the Woodville Association had that under consideration, and one of the proposals submitted to them was this: "Is your company prepared to cease the purchase of meat altogether and freeze on owners' account, and, if so, on what terms will you do it?" which, of course, involved a guarantee as to the number to be put through, and the company absolutely declined to do that. The reply is in the hands of our secretary, and in the face of that it is hardly clear how it can be said that they are willing to do what you say. The meat-producers